

3.20.2008 - Five Years in Iraq

March

19th marked the fifth anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq.

This week, and every week, I ask my fellow West Virginians to join me as we honor our fallen men and women, their comrades who have returned home, and those who continue to serve in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world.

We

must also thank their families, whose quiet sacrifice for our nation can never be fully repaid. They have performed their duties with bravery, dignity, and honor and have given America a new generation of heroes.

But

as we reflect on the amazing service and sacrifice these brave men and women have made during the war in Iraq, we must also reflect on the high price our military, our economy, and our children must pay for its continuation.

While

I stand united with the President in support of our troops, it is no secret that I have opposed this war from the very beginning and disagree with his stay-the-course strategy. It is not enough to tout the success of his troop surge, when the American people's calls for accountability, responsible spending, and an exit strategy from Iraq go unanswered.

While

I want nothing more than to see America forge peace in Iraq, as a Member of Congress, my duty—first and foremost—lies with the people of southern West Virginia and protecting the peace and prosperity of our State. Five hard-fought years later, the war in Iraq has taken a mighty toll on Americans at home and abroad—a toll we cannot afford to continue with no end in sight.

Thus

far, American soldiers have served in Iraq longer than U.S. involvement in World War I, World War II, or the Korean conflict. Nearly 4,000 Americans have lost their lives in Iraq with 30,000 more injured.

Our

mighty military is stretched thin and our economy is in shambles.

Our

nation spends an estimated \$123 billion a year on the war in Iraq. This figure is enormous, if intangible, and simply stating it fails to do justice to its incredible investment potential or the speed at which it is spent.

In

comparison, the entire cost to run the state of West Virginia from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 is only \$10.38

billion, roughly what we spend each month in Iraq.

Equally

amazing is the more than \$330 million that is spent in Iraq every day. As our nation faces increasing economic challenges, the high cost of the war in Iraq has diverted funding from critical education, transportation, healthcare, and other domestic priorities. Many hard-working American families rely on these programs to help make ends meet and, sadly, are suffering from these cuts at a time when they are needed most.

The

\$330 million is spent each day could reverse these cuts and reinvest in our Nations domestic infrastructure. With this money, we could:

Provide 270,000

children or 50,000 veterans with healthcare care coverage for a year;

Fund more than 900

additional National Institutes of Health research grants to study deadly and debilitating diseases;

Send over 50,000

soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen to a public university for a year;

Enroll nearly 46,000

more children in Head Start for a year; or

Help nearly 800,000

families keep their heat on this winter through the LIHEAP program.

The

war in Iraq

has grown into a colossal boondoggle that has weakened our economy and undermined our military readiness. At home in West Virginia, the added cost of gasoline, healthcare, and repeated redeployments as a result of the ongoing war in Iraq have placed many hard working taxpayers and military families at further risk for debt and foreclosure.

As

we enter the sixth year of the war, it is clearly time for a change. The cost of the war has simply become too high. In Congress, I will continue to push to bring our troops home, safe and sound, and end the cycle of pumping billions into a poorly planned war while shortchanging the domestic programs upon which many hard-working West Virginia families rely.